

# SANBAG City/County Conference

How to Be More Competitive for  
Public Grants  
A Strategic Approach

Presenter: Neil Blais, President and CEO

# Blais & Associates, Inc.

- Full service grant management firm
  - Founded in 2005
  - Research, Writing, and Grant Reporting
- Local government focus – 49 active clients
  - Client size ranges from City of Philadelphia to City of Farmersville
- In-house grant writing experience in all major grant areas:
  - ☑ Public Works/Transportation
  - ☑ Community Development/Planning
  - ☑ Economic Development
  - ☑ Parks & Recreation
  - ☑ Public Safety/Fire
  - ☑ Water/Power

# Personal

- I am an elected official too

That's me



Rancho Santa Margarita, CA  
2000-2010

Little Elm, TX 2014-Present  
High School Football Stadium

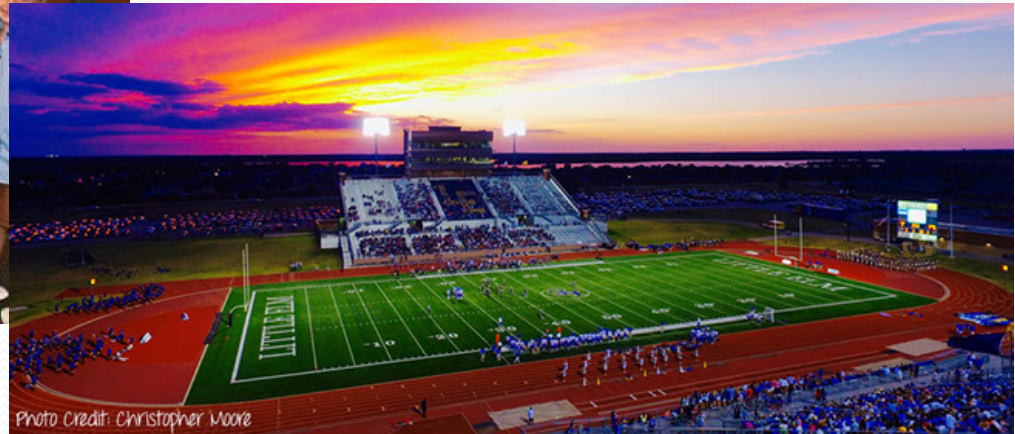


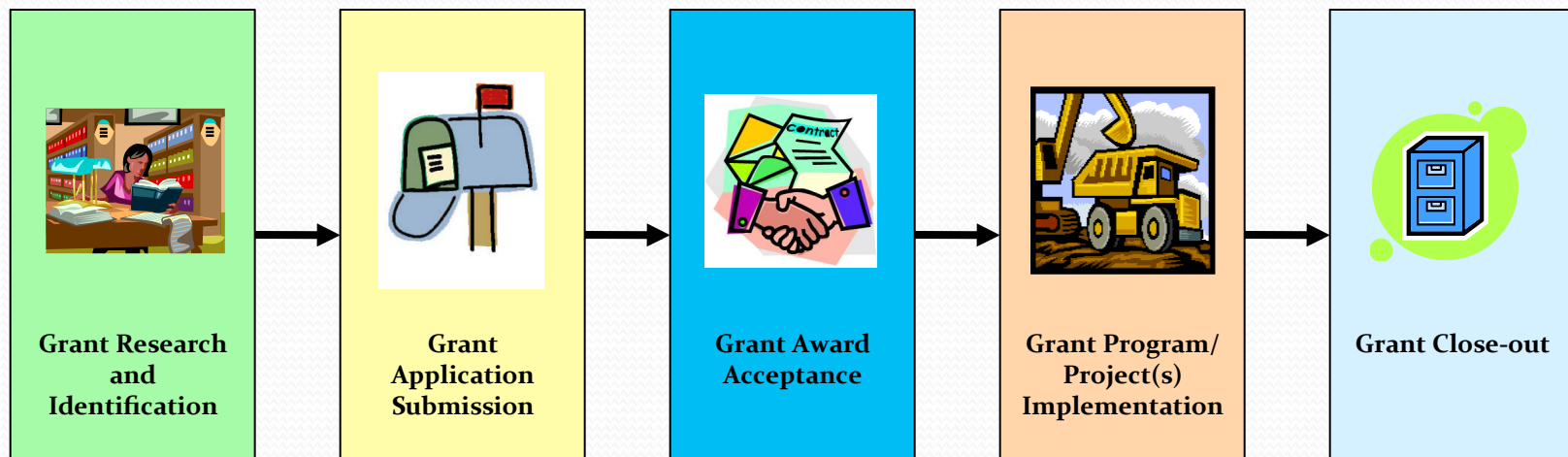
Photo Credit: Christopher Moore

# Why Grants?



- They provide you with another source of revenue
- Don't Think: I need X so find me Y grant.
- Think: There is Y grant, what can it fund? Now let me move money to fund X.

# Phases of Grant Management





# Formula for Success

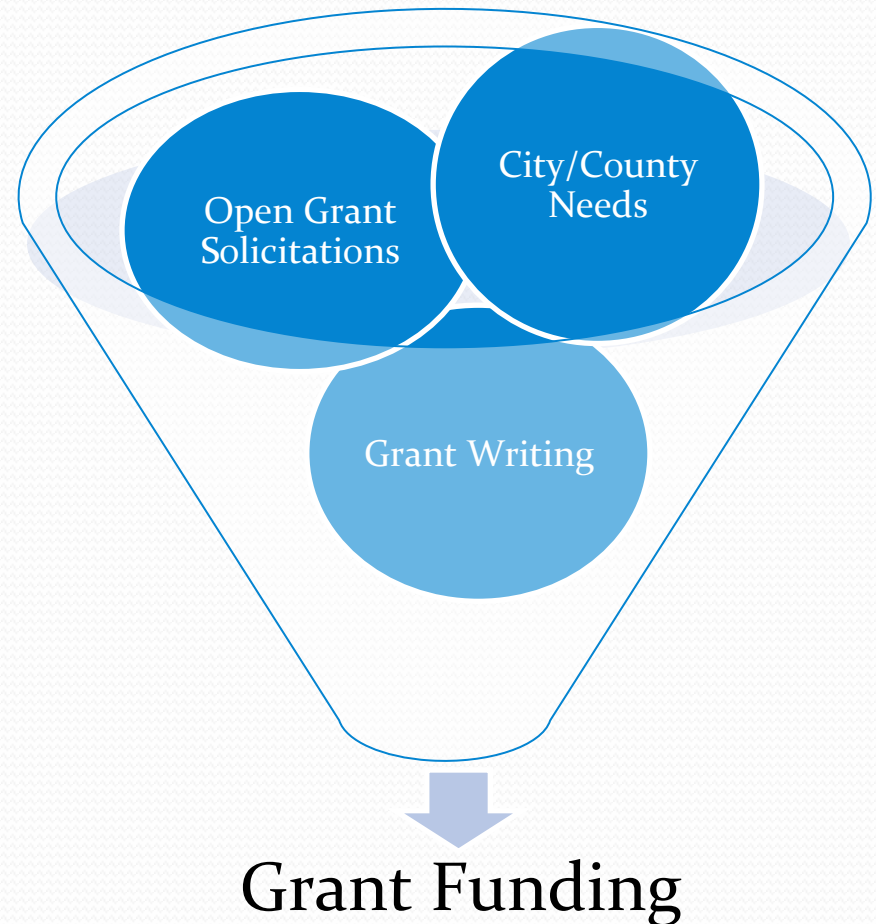
- Our most successful clients share these common characteristics:
  1. One internal grant contact and champion
  2. Grant champion has authority to make go/no go decisions
  3. Quick turn around on go/no go decisions, NTPs, and approvals
  4. Aggressive, but smart, grant submissions (okay to lose a few with resubmission the goal)
  5. Monthly check-in calls and include at least one staff person from each department
  6. City or County is “all in” – most, if not all, departments participate

# Elected & Executive Level

- **Relationship building.** Help staff by inviting your federal, state, and regional funding contacts to see your community and project sites.
- **Local** share. Help allocate funds for local match requirements. Allow flexibility to move money.
- **Latitude.** Provide general “go” support within parameters; this allows quick “go” decisions, which is crucial in the deadline driven grant environment.
- **Cheerleader.** Celebrate grant wins and encourage debriefings for resubmissions. Cannot win everything.

# Grant Strategy: Comprehensive, Systematic, Tested, Successful Approach

- Needs Assessment
- Daily Research
- Grant Opportunities Matched with Needs:
  - Evaluate cost/benefit of applying
- Logical “Go” or “No Go” decision
- Manage Grant Awards





# Determining “Needs”

- What are the major issues you face?
  - Transportation (e.g. gaps in sidewalk network)
  - Water Quality and Water Quantity Issues
  - Water Conservation
  - Redevelopment, Festivals, Arts
  - Parks/Open Space Development
  - Transit and Affordable Housing
  - Police and Fire (personnel and equipment)
  - Programs (e.g. after-school, summer day programs, etc.)
  - Special Populations (e.g. disabled, seniors, veterans, etc.)



# Finding the Grants

- Track grant sites daily
- Hire a consultant to do it for you
- Types of Grants
  - Federal (usually very competitive)
  - State
  - Regional (e.g. SANBAG, AQMD)
  - Nonprofit/Foundation



# Upcoming Grant Opportunities

(sample list)

Grant Program	Due Date
SANBAG Transportation Development Act Article 3/Phase I Bicycle/Pedestrian Facilities for ATP Match	April 8
Bureau of Reclamation Drought Resiliency Grant Program	April 11
Smart Policing	April 12
DOT's FASTLANE (new program this year)	April 14
Strengthening Law Enforcement & Community Relations	April 15
Body Worn Camera Grant	April 27
Fire Prevention and Safety Grant	May 6
Farmers' Market Promotion Program	May 12
Caltrans Active Transportation Program	~June 15
Prop. 1 Storm Water Implementation Grant Program	July 8

# Questions?

# Additional Slides for Specific Questions

# “Go” or “No Go” Decision

- Six Key Questions:
  - How large of a grant award can I expect?
  - Can we meet the local match?
  - How many applications were funded last year vs. applied?
  - Is my project solidly eligible/how will it score?
  - Do I have a niche story to tell? Why will the State/Feds fund my project?
  - Is writing an application worth the cost in time and resources?





# Writing the Grant

- Tips:

- Read Guidelines thoroughly
- Answer every question completely
- Review application several times to ensure proper grammar, flow and competitiveness of story
- Provide photos and letters of support, if allowed
- Have someone unfamiliar with project review grant
- Read Guidelines thoroughly, AGAIN
- Submit grant at least one day in advance of due date



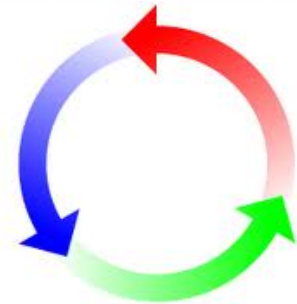
# Managing the Grant

- You've won the award! Now what?
  - Read through contract carefully
  - Identify requirements of grant reporting
  - Designate project manager responsible for reporting
  - Keep meticulous records for possible grant audit
  - Do not be late on reporting! Your ability to win future grants from the funding agency hinges on how well you manage this grant



# Grant Program Continuity

- Tracking and communication between staff/consultant provides constant grant-oriented thinking
- Most grant programs are cyclical
  - Watch future releases for project progression or resubmissions
- Post-submission management
  - Ensure successful completion and reporting of awarded grants
  - Provide debriefings for all declined grants



# Grant Best Practices

- Pre-submittal grant system in place
- Overall grant manager plus grant “go-getters”
- Outside consultant providing grant solicitations and relevant feedback
- “We want \$ for X” but also, “There’s \$ for Y; do we have a need for Y?”
- Know when to write internally; when to outsource

